

Michigan Agriculture News



FROM STATE SENATOR
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Serving the 25th District

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Dear Friend:

As the state's second largest industry, agriculture is one of the lifelines for Michigan economic health. Here at home, it is an important part of the economic vitality and quality of life in the 25th Senate District. As your State Senator, I want to provide you with a legislative update on our work to preserve and support our agricultural community.

I would also like to share some information that may be helpful to you. For more information on these topics, or any other legislative issue, please contact me toll-free at (877) GILBERT or by e-mail at senjgilbert@senate.michigan.gov. Best wishes for a productive and prosperous season!

Sincerely,



Jud Gilbert
State Senator

Boosting Michigan's Rural Economy

Michigan's rural areas could receive a much-needed economic boost under recently introduced legislation. Rural areas are a great place to live and raise a family but often face a competitive disadvantage for business and job creation. A smaller labor pool and a smaller tax base, which limits infrastructure development, can stunt economic growth opportunities. To support rural job development, the legislation would:

- Encourage trained workers to remain in rural areas through an educational loan repayment incentive. It would also create an agricultural processing apprenticeship program to increase skilled labor and help young people gain practical work skills.
- Require the Michigan Broadband Development Authority to allot \$1 million each year to rural, underserved areas through the seed capital loan program.
- Create a \$500 tax credit for landowners and companies for building cell phone towers in rural areas.
- Establish a low-interest loan program for methane digesters and a property tax exemption for agricultural renewable energy systems.
- Create an agriculture tourism zoning commission and an agriculture and rural communities advisory council to look at the effects of government rules and regulations on agricultural businesses.

The ideas for the rural development plan were generated by the agricultural community at an April 2004 food processing summit. For more information on this legislation or to be kept up to date on the progress of the package, contact my office toll-free at (877) GILBERT or by e-mail at senjgilbert@senate.michigan.gov.

2002 Census of Agriculture 25th Senate District

Number of Farms: 2,460

Land in Farms:
371,974 acres

Average Size of Farm:
151 acres

Irrigated Land:
2,919 acres

Total Number of
Farm Operators: 3,771

Market Value of
Production: \$90,864,000





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Protecting Investment: *The Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Program*

A new program is now in place to help provide a safety net for farmers. Starting this year, farm produce buyers or grain dealers in Michigan are required to collect a .002 premium when farm produce is sold to a dealer. Farm produce includes cereal grains, corn, dry edible beans, small grains and soybeans. The premiums go to the Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Fund to pay farmers in the event of a business failure of a farm produce or grain dealer. The program is voluntary. Farmers who have paid into the fund will be entitled to payment protection. Those producers who request a refund of the premiums paid will not be eligible to receive payment from the fund. More detailed information is available at www.michigan.gov/mda.

The fund is administered by the Michigan Farm Produce Insurance Authority under legislation enacted in 2003. Over the last ten years, the failure of licensed grain dealers in Michigan has resulted in a loss to producers of approximately \$1 million.

Battling the Emerald Ash Borer

Late last year, seven counties were added to the EAB quarantine area, including Branch, Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Hillsdale and Saginaw. The quarantine area now encompasses 20 counties in lower Michigan with numerous other areas around the state. These areas are isolated pockets of infestation separate from the generally infested quarantine area. Access the statewide quarantine map at www.michigan.gov/emeraldashborer.

The quarantine was expanded to help prevent the further spread of EAB and to minimize the resulting economic and environmental damage. The quarantine makes it illegal to move ash trees, branches, untreated lumber, deciduous firewood and any other materials from these areas unless chipped to one inch or smaller. In addition, the movement of all ash nursery stock is prohibited in the entire Lower Peninsula.

Cutting Red Tape

Milk producers and livestock dealers are among those helped by a more efficient state permit and license system under legislation enacted last year. The new laws establish a maximum processing time for licenses and permits and require the Department of Agriculture to return application fees and provide a 15 percent discount the following year if the processing deadline is missed. Public Acts 277, 278, 279 and 280 were part of a Senate effort to dismantle barriers to job creation in Michigan. Visit www.michiganlegislature.org or contact my office for more information.

FARM FORUM IN LAPEER

On June 10, 2005, Senator Jud Gilbert held a panel discussion and public meeting on agriculture and land preservation in Lapeer. This meeting was an opportunity for legislative leaders from the area and representatives from various agencies to hear firsthand from farmers and rural residents about the challenges they face every day.

Senator Gilbert arranged for an impressive panel of agriculture and land use experts to discuss these issues and answer questions from attendees. Panel participants included the Michigan Department of Agriculture, USDA Rural Development Office, Michigan and Lapeer County Farm Bureau, and local land preservation leaders.

While guests asked questions and offered their opinions on a variety of topics, the primary focus of the meeting was discussion on what the Legislature is doing to promote Michigan's agricultural economy and preserve farm communities throughout the state.



Senator Jud Gilbert and Lapeer Farm Bureau President John Stack answer questions during the Agriculture and Land Use public meeting.

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